

STATINTL

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# Nixon's 7-Point Dilemma

AN AGONIZING dilemma has been created for President Nixon by the Communists' new seven-point peace proposal which, when read carefully by expert eyes, is fully as hard and perhaps just a bit harder than what has preceded it from Hanoi.

What makes North Vietnam's ploy so clever is that the seven points seem softer. That places Mr. Nixon under growing pressure from the Democratic opposition, worried Republican politicians, some administration officials; and the American public generally to accept the seven points.

But careful analysis shows that even the grudging White House response (re-layed through press secretary Ron Ziegler) that the seven points contain "positive, as well as clearly unacceptable, elements" is overly charitable. Rather, Hanoi's new peace plan contains no assurance that American prisoners of war will be automatically released because of an immediate U.S. troop pullout. Hanoi still appears to be demanding a new government in Saigon as the ultimate ransom price for the POWs.

THUS, the dilemma for the President: to negotiate seriously on the seven points undercuts the Saigon regime's hope for survival;

to reject the seven points out of hand threatens Mr. Nixon's paper-thin popular support in a war-weary nation. Moreover, this dilemma is tinged with a double irony.

First, the intense political pressure undercutting the anti-Communist effort in South Vietnam coincides with continued military difficulties for Communist forces. Suffering acute problems of morale and logistics, Hanoi's legions could not soon achieve a military victory over South Vietnamese forces still supplied by the U.S.

Second, the beguiling nature of Hanoi's seven points can be traced partly to the White House. Against the better judgment of some State Department officials, the President tied the highly emotional POW question to the Paris negotiations. For months, experts here have expected Hanoi to exploit this by, in effect, asking a high ransom for the prisoners. Now, the worst expectations of the experts have been realized.

Actually, the seven points do not significantly enlarge on Hanoi's past offers merely to "discuss" POW release if the U.S. sets a troop withdrawal deadline. Point No. 1 merely says that if the U.S. sets a date "for

the withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1971 of the totality of U.S. forces," then "the parties will at the same time agree" on a release of the prisoners. To hardheaded analysts, this wording does not guarantee an automatic freeing of the POWs.

More important is the meaning of "totality of U.S. forces." Hanoi is not talking about merely U.S. soldiers and airmen but also "weapons and war materials of the United States" and "all U.S. bases in South Vietnam." In other words, Mr. Nixon would have to condemn to death the huge, westernized military machine of South Vietnam which had been built to Washington's specifications.

THE CRUCIAL POINT No. 1 also begins with a demand for the U.S. to "put an end to its war of aggression in Vietnam." Does that mean no more sponsorship of Saigon's military activity and, therefore, require a purge of President Nguyen Van Thieu? Almost surely, Hanoi will demand precisely that before POWs are released.

Indeed, some experts outside the government even disagree with the Central Intelligence Agency's assessment that, at the least, the Communists no longer de-

mand a coalition government in Saigon. The CIA view is contradicted by a South Vietnamese Communist spokesman who declared, just after the seven points were unveiled, that the coalition government remains an essential goal.

Nor is any serious credence given to present promises by North Vietnamese officials that they merely want "an independent neutral South Vietnam." In fact, no serious Hanoiologist doubts the permanent goal of a united Communist Vietnam in the immediate future. North Vietnamese leader Pham Van Dong recently expressed hope that the city of Hanoi "proves itself worthy of being the capital of the Socialist North at present and of being the capital of the entire country in the future."

THE COMMUNISTS count on American war-weariness to overlook these ambiguities and contradictions and, instead, swallow the seven points whole. So far, they have been entirely correct. That establishes a painful test whether Mr. Nixon can continue his courageous consistency on Vietnam in the face of American public opinion open to Hanoi's blandishments and uninterested in past national commitments.

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